

“Aged Wisdom and the Moral Allegory of the ‘Februarie Eclogue’

in Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender*”

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have long speculated about the outcome of the debate that takes place between Cuddie and Thenot in the “Februarie Eclogue” of Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender*. Although in his introductory gloss E.K. claims that the eclogue is “rather morall and generall, then bent to any secrete or particular purpose” (Spenser 509), this statement has not deterred critics from hypothesizing as to what Spenser’s actual meaning might have been. The eclogue opens with a discussion between an old shepherd and a young herdsman’s boy regarding their perceptions of the seasons which soon turns into a debate centering on the merits of youth and old age. Spenser critics argue that the fable of the Oak and Briar, which Thenot relates to Cuddie, is Spenser’s oblique reference to the troubled relationships between particular individuals in Elizabeth’s court, while others believe that the fable is the poet’s Puritan analysis of Elizabethan religious turmoil. Most assert that neither Thenot nor Cuddie come out of the debate as the clear winner; therefore, the eclogue closes in an unresolved and tense stasis. Critics often focus on the fable at the expense of the dialogue between the Thenot and Cuddie, so they are comfortable with these analyses because if the relationship between the characters is unsettled, then various explicit historical or religious interpretations can be ascribed to the eclogue as a whole. However, I will argue that when Elizabethan society and contemporary literary and religious works are taken into consideration, the suggestion that Spenser is conveying his own provocative viewpoints should be discarded in favour of the idea that the entire eclogue is a sophisticated examination of the perennial conflict between generations, and how this conflict influenced the continued reformation of the English Church.

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Tara Chambers

For Zachary Sebastian
The wisest “Cuddie” I know

Most critics of the “Februarie Eclogue” in Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender* agree that the debate between Thenot and Cuddie ends in an impasse. Thenot, the old shepherd, supports his argument with the fable of the Oak and Briar and concludes with an “Embleme” (Spenser 427) that claims that God, because He is old, fashions old men in His image:

Iddio perche e vècchio,

Fa suoi al suo essemplio. (427)

Conversely, Cuddie, the young herdsman’s boy, dismisses Thenot’s fable and counters Thenot’s emblem with his own that declares that no old man fears the Lord:

Niunto vècchio,

Spaventa iddio. (427)

EK glosses Cuddie’s emblem as meaning that because they have weathered many storms of fortune, old men do not fear the Lord and are more often prone to “fond fooleries” (427) than their younger counterparts. If this is truly Cuddie’s response to Thenot’s emblem, then the young herdsman’s boy has either misinterpreted or ignored the important points that the old shepherd has tried to communicate throughout the debate and fable.

In his introductory gloss E.K. claims that the eclogue is “rather morall and generall, then bent to any secrete or particular purpose” (423), yet this assertion has not deterred critics from looking for historical allusions to ongoing conflicts in Elizabethan England. Paul McLane, for example, suggests that the fable represents the struggle for influence that was taking place within the Elizabethan court and identifies Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, with the decaying Oak and Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, with the ambitious Briar (62). Jefferson Fletcher claims that the Oak symbolizes the Roman Catholic Church and the Briar the Anglican Church, and he suggests that the fable is Spenser’s Presbyterian critique of both (635). While some literary critics have laboured to uncover the purpose, people, and events informing Spenser’s “Februarie Eclogue,” Patrick Collinson calls attempts at such identification unreasonable because it is clear that Spenser carefully laboured to conceal historical allusions (215). Yet even critics who are mindful of E.K.’s denial in the “Argument” that the “Februarie Eclogue” has a secret purpose still insist that the debate ends in a stalemate. Nancy Jo Hoffman and Jonathon Richardson argue that the shepherds are speaking at cross purposes, and Richardson maintains that there is “no visible progress” (23) in the debate between Cuddie and Thenot. Patsy Cornelius claims that the emblems at the end of the eclogue, and E.K.’s interpretation of them, indicate that Thenot and

Cuddie are no closer to an agreement than they were at the beginning; thus she asserts that Spenser is claiming that youth and age should live in harmony (62).

In his examination of the “Orgoglio Episode” in *The Faerie Queene*, S.K. Heninger rightly observes that because Elizabethans would have found “any dichotomy between history and morality offensive” (171), the modern propensity for disassociating the ‘historical’ and the ‘moral’ allegory “can easily lead to a perversion of Spenser’s purpose” (171). Like E.K., Heninger urges scholars to investigate the moral allegory, which had been largely neglected by his predecessors. Therefore, I shall argue that even when the question of specific historical, courtly, and religious allusions is set aside, the “Februarie Eclogue” must be recognized as a moral commentary on the transformations to the religious and social structures that were taking place in Tudor England throughout the sixteenth century, and central to these changes were the tensions between modernity and tradition and youth and age.

When the two opposing emblems at the end of the “Februarie Eclogue” are considered along with Thenot and Cuddie’s lively debate, and Thenot’s fable of the Oak and Briar, the moral allegory warning headstrong young people about the consequences of dismissing the wisdom of their learned elders can scarcely be missed. Even after learning of the Briar’s fate, Cuddie still appears somewhat unreceptive to Thenot’s knowledge, yet by arguing in the debate, and by relating the fable, Thenot is trying to make Cuddie understand that finding contentment and consolation when faced with the mutability of life in God’s divine order is more conducive to happiness than devoting one’s youth to virility and fleeting recreations. Cuddie’s resistance to the wise counsel of age is a common youthful error, and the eclogue invites the reader not only to examine the perennial conflict between the generations, but also to consider the means of resolving this conflict, which impedes significant religious progress in England. When the debate, fable, and the concluding emblems are considered with respect to these contemporary tensions, Thenot proves to be a wise teacher whose argument is meant to guide the resistant young Cuddie toward a life of Protestant piety, conscience, and reflection.

As Peter Marshall points out, the country that Elizabeth inherited when she ascended the throne in 1558 was “certainly not a nation of Protestants” (145), and contrary to the Protestant vision, England remained attached to certain vestiges of tastes and behaviours that kept the country linked to its popish past rather than fitting it for church reform. Paul Griffiths remarks that the “older folk were said to be lost among their beads or images and ‘out of date’” (178), and

the proponents of a more radical reform than Elizabeth's religious settlement had thus far provided realized that it would be difficult to dissuade the older generation to forsake their religious practices. Without the guaranteed support of the older generation, reform leaders "made a special appeal to the young, who were always willing to be rallied to a fresh cause" (178). Youthful enthusiasm was integral to religious change, but religious reformers realized that depending on it for eradicating Roman Catholicism throughout England was risky because passion must be tempered by good judgement, a characteristic not often associated with the younger generation.

Sixteenth-century theologians and pedagogues, whether Catholic or Reformed, perceived the younger generation as "wild, headstrong, and passionate" (Brigden 38). Ilana Ben-Amos remarks that the Galenic images of young malcontents consumed by red choler fostered the conviction that the bold arrogance of youth led to social dangers such as rebelliousness and insubordination (16-17). Catholics maintained that the spread of Protestantism in the earlier decades of the sixteenth century was the direct result of "youthful predilections" (17), so they attacked young people as a threat to traditional Christianity, and thus the correct social order. As Susan Brigden points out, Catholics argued that the younger generation "found in the doctrines of Protestantism the perfect excuse and legitimation for their natural tendency for disobedience" (31). In his book *The Apology*, Sir Thomas More blamed the rumblings of the Reformation upon a conspiracy of "lewde laddes" (quoted in Brigden 37) who were eager to discard the faith of their fathers in favour of their new heresy (37). Brigden also cites the 1538 *Sermon Made Before the Kynge at Grenewich upon Good Fryday*, in which the Bishop of Lincoln and Henry VIII's confessor John Longland "places great emphasis on the importance of obedience" (48) and condemns the "Lusty Iuventus Youth" as "by nature ill-disciplined and savage" (quoted in Brigden 38).

Because there was a dichotomy between traditional structures of obedience and the desire for modernity, an anxiety developed about the correct way to preserve the proper social hierarchy and a reverence for age in an environment that favoured permanent religious change. The younger generation's enthusiasm for radical reform notwithstanding, Tudor England's Protestant leaders were not willing to disregard the divine order, which explicitly demands adherence to some basic religious, social, and moral tenets. *Elizabethan Homily XXI* "Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion" states, "...God forthwith by laws given unto mankind,

repaired again the rule and order of obedience...and besides obedience due unto his Majesty, he...ordained that in families and households, the wife should be obedient unto her husband, the children unto their parents, the servants unto their masters” (II.21.1.64-68). Moreover, Griffiths explains that the catechism was a primary element “of a system of mass education” (84), and fundamental to this instruction was the awareness and appreciation for the Ten Commandments, where the Fifth Commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Becon 89) appears central in relation to the other commands. Lacey Baldwin Smith points out that the results of youthful disobedience were not particularly pleasant. There was an understanding that “the eye that mocketh his father and despiseth his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick out and the young eagles shall eat it” (196); therefore, those who scorned the authority of their parents and elders would be cast out and be subject to many trials and tribulations.

Acknowledging such indisputable social and religious principles, as well as the difficulty of weaning the elderly from spiritual practices held for a lifetime, English reformers turned their attention to providing the younger generation with a Christian humanist education. Griffiths explains, “pedagogy was seen by contemporaries as a vital aspect of reform, and a means to steer young people away from centuries of darkness and ignorance” (82). The Protestant Reformation was not a complete rejection of the church; it was a rejection of the corruption and superstition that informed contemporary Roman Catholicism. Reform leaders expected that by instructing the younger generation through a proper humanist education, youth would have a better chance of resisting false doctrines, sin, and vice that were associated with pagan Rome, which would ultimately result in the steady growth of Protestantism for the perfection of humankind. Isabel Rivers discusses that some writers believed that a humanist education removed the effects of Original Sin because it “removes the consequences of the fall and restores man, a rational and fully developed creature, to his Creator” (130), while Northrop Frye maintains that Elizabethans placed considerable value on education because man was born into the “order of physical nature which is theologically ‘fallen’ and under the sway of Mutability” (708). It is through education that man is granted a conscious choice where “he must either sink below into sin, or rise above into his proper human home” (709). As a result, Reformers argued that not only the correct education, but the correct education provided by the appropriate instructors, was crucial for the

spiritual salvation of young individuals and guaranteed England's continued progression away from the corrupt doctrines found in Roman Catholicism.

The wise guidance dispensed by Thenot throughout the eclogue, and Cuddie's arrant refusal to consider it, exemplify the persistent problem faced by those charged with educating the younger generation. This problem was a subject explored by other Tudor period writers such as Richard Weaver and John Lyly. Both Weaver's *An Enterlude Called Lusty Juventus* and Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* examine the conflict and consequences when inexperienced self-confident youth resist the guidance of those who possess spiritual knowledge and the wisdom of experience. Furthermore, not only do the young men in both works favour wilfulness and self-direction at the expense of accepting and internalizing the wise instruction of a learned teacher, they also discover that not all teachers are guaranteed to be morally appropriate instructors offering morally and spiritually superior direction. Euphues dismisses the wise advice offered by his teacher Eubulus, while Juventus errs when he neglects the instruction of Good Counsel for Hypocrisy's flawed arguments. Because of their irrational and untutored decisions, both characters facilitate their own undoing, and they discover that choosing personal experience over proper counsel is merely childish impudence that results in personal spiritual and moral harm.

Spiritual and moral harm are not compatible with the image of a green and golden pastoral world, and although *The Shepheardes Calender* belongs in the pastoral tradition, 'pastoral' is not a particularly suitable label for the "Februarie Eclogue." In order to clarify the tradition, Bruce Thornton states, "Pastoral sees the natural world as harmonious with human desire, making possible an ethic of *otium* or leisure conducive to love and art" (1). A world that is in harmony with human desire and offers an environment of peaceful leisure conducive to thoughts of love and the creation of art that Thornton identifies as the 'pastoral' is manifestly absent in the eclogue and 'pastoral' is not a helpful term when trying to understand the conflict that underlies Thenot and Cuddie's debate. In his description of Spenser's "Mutabilitie Cantos," Northrop Frye explains that man is born into the world of ordinary experience and physical nature whose "central symbol is the cycle, the round of days, months, and hours, which Mutability brings forth as evidence of her supremacy" (708). As Isabel McCaffrey writes, throughout *The Shepheardes Calender* Spenser addresses this world and the "preoccupations of fallen man as well as the vision of unfallen bliss" (92). The result of this dichotomy is that Spenser's pastoral vision is "not idyllic, there are storms with sunshine, good and bad people"

(92). “Februarie” in particular is still part of the postlapsarian world that is represented by a winter burdened by destructive forces more appropriate to the georgic tradition than to a genre where leisure activities are at the centre of daily existence. As expected during the month of February, the georgic tradition demands hard labour and steadfast endurance if the characters wish to overcome their present conditions. The weather is cold and the shepherds, along with their flocks and herds, are forced to suffer outside in the winter chill.

Cuddie, the young herdsman’s boy in the “Februarie Eclogue,” identifies himself with spring and bucolic recreation, so his impatience for the arrival of a new season makes labour in February’s harsh conditions even more difficult for him to bear. At the opening of the eclogue, Cuddie complains of the “ranke Winters rage” (Spenser FE 1), which jeopardizes the young man’s lustiness as well as the vitality of his herd. A budding pastoral poet, Cuddie dramatically expresses his discomfort, protesting that his “ragged ronts all shiver and shake / As doen high Towers in an earthquake” (5-6) while complaining that the tails of his calves, which were once “Perke as Peakcock, (8), now lie limp and frozen in the winter chill. Elizabethans considered earthquakes God’s admonishments and reminders to mankind that they must reform their wicked ways (Heninger OE 173), so by connecting earthquakes to the season’s cruel conditions, Cuddie may be reflecting on this Elizabethan Christian interest in divine portent which Heninger explores in his examination of the Orgoglio episode in *The Faerie Queene*, Book I. Furthermore, by drawing on the peacock as a simile for the once “Perke” tales of his herd, Cuddie unwittingly reveals his own vanity and pride. Unfortunately, the herdsman’s boy is young and untutored, and therefore he is impervious to the wider implications of his utterance.

In contrast to Cuddie’s inability to associate any deeper meaning with his grievance, Thenot, the wise old shepherd, is cautiously familiar with the temporal order, and as Robert Durr notes, he immediately “berates Cuddie for his complaints against the unalterable progress of the Lord’s seasons... implying that a shepherd’s business is not to play nor to question providence but to believe and to serve” (274). Having experienced the year’s cycles time and again, Thenot, stoically accepts their current situation, and instead of commiserating with Cuddie’s grievances, Thenot admonishes the “laesie ladde” (Spenser 9) not only for his petty protests, but also for his ignorance of the correspondences between the cycles of the seasons and the cycles of life. He tries to offer the young herder words of wisdom and comfort:

Must not the world wend in his commun course

From good to bad, and from bade to worse,
From worse unto that is worst of all
And then returne to his former fall?
Who will not suffer the stormy time
Where will he live tyll the lusty prime? (11-16)

Patrick Cullen detects a bias in the old shepherd's wisdom, and he argues that Thenot is claiming that old age is the 'lusty prime' that man lives his life for (38), while Nancy Jo Hoffman suggests that Thenot is deliberately avoiding the weather issue with his reply to Cuddie so that he can "moralize against sensitivity or being indulgent of ungentleness" (93). She claims that Thenot uses the young man's criticism of winter in order to examine human nature and to address the kind of disposition that is required to enjoy a long and contented life. If Thenot's questions are considered merely envious rebuttals to Cuddie's youthful anticipation of the arrival of spring, both Cullen and Hoffman's contention that the debate ends in an impasse would appear to be correct. However, when the present season and Cuddie's complaints are taken into consideration, it is evident that Thenot's argument is more sophisticated than that. Thenot's motivation for his questions is not to convince Cuddie that the weather is not deplorable; he is using Cuddie's complaint to point out how the cycle of the seasons corresponds with the much more significant cycles that humankind has been subject to since its decline into sin, and that since the Fall, human beings have been forced to weather many physical and spiritual storms.

Spenser revisits the subject of cycles in *The Faerie Queene*, when Prince Arthur states "that blisse may not abide in state of mortall men" (I. VIII.44. 5-6). However, just as "lusty prime" always replaces "Sommer's flame...[and]... Winter's threat," (Spenser FE 20), eventually it will be revealed once and for all that humanity's fall was indeed a fortunate one. In his examination of the allegorical significance of the allusions in "The Orgoglio Episode," Heninger remarks that the Book of Revelation provided many of the central doctrines from which "Protestant scholiasts derived their theories of damnation and redemption" (176), and as Revelation dictates, the final revolution of the temporal cycle will occur: humankind will attain perfection, Mutability will be cast out of the world of ordinary experience, and the lower and upper nature will be reunited. Once these events take place, those chosen for salvation will again experience the eternal Golden Age that was originally enjoyed by Adam and Eve. Because he understands these basic truths, Thenot explains to Cuddie that he was never "Fortune[s] foeman"

(Spenser FE 21), and his acceptance means that he has managed to survive both season and circumstance in order to ensure that his “flock was [his] chief care” (22-23). With his flock being his primary concern, Thenot “gently took, that ungently came” (22); therefore, the old shepherd’s life of submission to forces that are out of his control has remained largely agreeable.

Contemporaneous to the belief that those worthy of God’s grace will soon return to their postlapsarian state, and as Spenser suggests in the “Mutabilitie Cantos” of *The Faerie Queene*, “And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see” (59), was the belief that the final decline marking the end of Mutability’s reign was also applicable to Europe’s contentious religious situation. Elizabethans considered the cycle to be entering its final revolution out of a state of decline through efforts to reform the corrupt Roman Catholic Church. Discontent with the current religious situation resonated throughout Christendom, and soon papist Rome with all its temporal power and spiritual manipulation became synonymous with the sinful fallen world of tyranny and corruption. Idolatry, abuses, unchaste, uneducated, and absent clergy, dubious financial dealings, and the sales of offices and indulgences were attacked by theologians such as John Wycliff and later, Martin Luther (Rivers 88-89). Rivers explains that dissatisfaction of the faithful resulted in a desire to recover the past and return to the original texts of “the Bible and the early Fathers” (89). Furthermore, Elizabethans recognized that the sixteenth century had provided many instances where the country experienced cycles both politically and religiously. From Henry’s break with Rome and Edward’s Protestant Reformation, to Mary’s bloody Counter-Reformation, and finally to Elizabeth’s contentious Religious Settlement, those who were focussed on a complete transformation of the English church recognized how easily the cycle of progress could lapse into a state of decline. Adding to their apprehension was the threat that Elizabeth would follow through with the proposed marriage to the Duc d’Alençon, which would not only align England with France, but might also restore open tolerance of the Roman Catholic Church. As a result of this anxiety, the promise for a continued campaign for a purified English Church rested on the hope that English youth in particular were intellectually, spiritually, and morally up to the task of moving church reform further than the Elizabethan Religious Settlement had thus far allowed.

Throughout the debate in the “Februarie Eclogue,” Cuddie clearly epitomizes the problem with the younger generation that church leaders wished to address if they were going to eliminate corrupt Catholicism and restore the Apostolic model of Christianity. Although Thenot

offers Cuddie what seems to be wise counsel on not only how to endure the cold winter months, but also how to navigate successfully life's adversities in order to find faith in God's providential plan and peace with his condition, his efforts seem to be in vain. Instead of taking a moment to consider what Thenot has said, Cuddie uses the old shepherd's words against him. Thenot's implicit suggestion that eternal life is what accompanies the return of the "lusty prime" is entirely ignored by Cuddie. Instead, the youth considers Thenot's stoic acceptance of winter as the desperate argument of a pessimistic and lustless old man. Cuddie claims that while his "youth is foe to frost" (31), it is no wonder that Thenot does not mind the cold, "[f]or Age and Winter accord full nie" (27). Hoffman suggests that it is Thenot who never becomes "human enough to admit the process of change" (93); however, it is Cuddie who obstinately refuses to consider anything except his loss of vigour, which keeps him trapped in the temporal present while the old shepherd displays the strongest desire to contemplate the eternal future.

Although his language is unsympathetic, Thenot's advice to Cuddie is not meant to be malicious; rather it is a warning about the dangers of missed opportunity, laziness, and ingratitude. Nevertheless, Cuddie dismisses Thenot's counsel and remains focussed on his virility. He believes Thenot's warnings are the old shepherd's envious attempts to suppress youth's budding sexuality, and instead of taking a moment to allow Thenot's words to sink in, Cuddie counters Thenot's advice with language intended to wound the old man for the sake of winning a rhetorical competition. However, Cuddie's rash response to Thenot's advice does not take into account the fundamental truth about the fickleness of Fortune or the unalterable sequences that comprise the seasons and life. Cuddie elects to attack the old shepherd personally, insisting that since Thenot has lost "both lopp and top" (57), the young man's "budding branch [Thenot] wouldest cropp" (58). Cuddie's singular anxiety over the old shepherd's plans regarding the young man's "budding branch" is evidence that regardless of Thenot's wise words, the herdsman boy's chief concerns, besides winning the debate, remain his immediate circumstances and his libido.

Thenot chooses to ignore Cuddie's insults and outlines the dangers that face idle youth. He warns that there will come a time when young "heardgroomes" (35) who "thinken to be Lords of the yeare" (41) and lazily pipe the pleasant seasons away will find themselves trapped in "the breme wintere with chamfred brows" (43). The herds that have been lazily tended throughout the warmer months will be annoyed with the cold, and the youths who follow vain

pursuits will be full of “weeping and wailing and misery” (50) and forced to pay the price for squandering all their precious time. Because of Cuddie’s resistance to Thenot’s words, at this point in the eclogue, there is no indication that Cuddie will ever consider the sage advice Thenot has thus far provided. As a result of his continued petulance, Cuddie may be forced to discover that Thenot’s instruction is actually a much softer teacher than experience.

In one respect young people were considered to be the generation most capable and willing to discard the religious doctrines of the past that were now viewed as superstitious and corrupt, yet as Cuddie demonstrates, their penchant for idle pursuits and rash judgments meant that uneducated young men could not be trusted with control of a society that continued to experience such rapid change. The interconnected problems of the need to train youth for the sake of the Reformation and the younger generation’s headstrong ignorance were subjects that were explored by other Protestant writers. For example, Weaver’s *Lusty Juventus* and Lyly’s *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* highlight the dangers faced by young people who choose to disregard the advantages of education dispensed through sage advice in favour of fulfilling their own reckless desires. As Erasmus observes, “Experience is the common schoolhouse for fools and ill men” (quoted in Helgerson EP 63). Helgerson notes, “the prodigality of the son who defies his father’s counsel is ruinous, not momentarily...but forever” (35). In an attempt to avoid such a religious, moral, and social catastrophe, both Weaver and Lyly convey the message that appropriate attention should be paid to instruction by wise elders who are able to communicate not only knowledge but also experience because for many years they have been the recipients of good and bad fortune. Because of their personal awareness of the fickleness of fortune, they, like Thenot, are the most appropriate choices to educate the younger generation, so that “youth may be prevented from having to rely on the painful lessons of experience” (63).

As his Latin name implies, Weaver’s *Juventus* is a teenager: he has not yet lived “a score,” and just as Cuddie disparages winter and anticipates the coming spring, *Juventus* lives by the principle that “in youth is pleasure” (Weaver 40) and “dreams of mirth and play” (39). The drama opens with the Messenger’s warning that because mankind is naturally prone to evil, young people must receive appropriate religious and moral training:

And a wanton child wilful will be.
Give him no liberty in youth, nor his folly excuse,
Bow down his neck, and keep him in good awe,

Lest he be stubborn. (Weaver 1)

Following this prologue, Good Counsel and Knowledge proffer moral and religious instruction that is congruent with a life of Protestant piety: Juventus' elders "were wrapped in ignorance / Being deceived by false preachers" (243-244), and the young man is prone to sensuous pleasures. After listening to Good Counsel's arguments against ignorance and vain pursuits, Juventus vows to give up the "false doctrine" (246) that has impeded the older generation's spiritual progress as well as to amend his own bad behaviour.

Because Juventus is young and uneducated, he is incapable of grasping the implications of evil rhetoric and of understanding what constitutes a wise and proper guide. Hypocrisy disguised as Friendship, alludes to the Fifth Commandment, "Can you deny, but it is your duty / Unto your elders to be obedient?" (643-44). Juventus' answer is somewhat guarded: "I grant I am bound to obey my parents / In all things honest and lawful" (645-46), which makes him vulnerable to Hypocrisy's rebuttal:

Lawful, quod-a? ah, fool, fool!
Wilt thou set men to school,
When they be old?
I may say to you secretly,
The world was never merry,
Since children were so bold:
Now every boy will be a teacher,
The father a fool, and the child a preacher
This is pretty gear:
The foul presumption of youth
Will turn shortly to great ruth,
I fear, I fear, I fear. (647-658)

Hypocrisy's demand for traditional social order leads Juventus to forget his earlier instruction by Good Counsel and Knowledge. Juventus' clouded judgement of Hypocrisy's expert rhetoric demonstrates the difficulty that reformers faced in balancing respect for elders with teaching the younger generation to embrace church reform. This clouded judgement also illustrates how easily young people could be led off course and into spiritual ruin.

Like Spenser's Cuddie, Lyly's Euphues is a "self-confident, inexperienced youth...intent upon pleasure" (Scragg 4) while his elderly teacher Eubulus is an old man who is "conscious of moral danger" (4) that awaits young people not educated in the ways of the world. Eubulus questions Euphues' upbringing: "the tender youth of a child is like the tempering of wax, apt to receive any form" (Lyly 35), but this young man may have been made "wanton with too much cockering" (35). Judith Rice Henderson writes that Euphues, the "young hothead" (153), should be forgiven for his youthful egotism, for "his is a common failing" (148), and she notes that instead of considering the words of his friendly advisor, the young man becomes impertinent and engages Eubulus in a rhetorical argument (155). Scoffing at the older man's warning against moving to Naples, Euphues argues that Eubulus seems to love the young man's nature yet loathes his nurture (Lyly 39), yet the youth denies that "nature may anyways be altered by education" (39). Juventus is easily persuaded by both evil and good counsellors, but like Cuddie when faced with the fundamental truths in Thenot's wise counsel, Euphues is more interested in being contrary than choosing the correct moral path, and his "self-conscious comments...show that he is impudently confident of beating the old man at the game of eloquence" (Henderson 155). Rivers points out that the prevailing attitude throughout the Renaissance was that oratory and wisdom could not be separated without causing some kind of social or moral harm. (126). She writes that "philosophy without oratory is sterile, while oratory without philosophy is dangerous" (126). Although Euphues proves that he is skilled in the basic art of rhetoric, his singular determination to defeat his friendly counsellor in a verbal sparring match, regardless of his flawed certainties, demonstrates that like Cuddie, he is at a point in his life where the young sophist has no interest in true wisdom or a proper education; his interest lies solely in being right. Like most young people, only after his immature misconduct causes him to become the victim of fickle Fortune does the young Euphues recognize the value of the elderly Eubulus's knowledge and his teacher's argument that proper education is preferable to personal experience (Henderson 160). In "Of the Education of Youth," Euphues indirectly praises the virtues of the wise old guide he once ridiculed: "when this young infant shall grow in years and be that ripeness that he can conceive learning...he is to be committed to the tuition of some tutor, all diligence is to be had to search such a one as shall neither be unlearned, neither ill lived, neither a light person" (Lyly 105). Later, Euphues recalls Eubulus' argument that he disputed in the past. He writes, "It is good nurture that leadeth to virtue and discreet demeanour that planeth the path to felicity"

(107). Through this admission Euphues comes full circle; like Juventus, he finally realizes that the lessons learned through hard experience show that disregarding the wisdom that age affords for the sake of fulfilling immature desires is not congruent with living an orderly and virtuous life.

While both Juventus and Euphues eventually learn to appreciate wise counsel, throughout the debate in the “Februarie Eclogue” Cuddie prefers to listen to himself speak of youthful fancies and Thenot’s aged foolishness, so like Eubulus with Euphues, Thenot tests another rhetorical strategy in order to illustrate vividly his moral that thus far has fallen on Cuddie’s deaf ears. In the eclogue’s “Argument,” E.K. remarks that Thenot relates the fable “so lively and so feelingly, as if the thing were set forth in some Picture before our eyes” (Spenser 510). By employing the fable as a pedagogical device, Thenot is following the Erasmian system of instruction that, as T.W. Baldwin’s has shown, was a popular in the Tudor grammar school setting (cited in Henderson 140). Joanna Martindale explains that Erasmus believed in man’s educability and maintained that there is a fundamental importance to knowledge “which cannot be gained solely from experience” (53). Therefore, Thenot’s tactic supports the model of Erasmian humanist education where “illustrative examples” such as “stories, fables, and proverbs” could be used as effective teaching tools (Henderson 144).

In order to pique Cuddie’s interest, Thenot informs the herdsman’s boy that the fable is one that he learned from Tityrus. E.K. glosses, “I suppose he meane[s] Chaucer” (Spenser 512). While supporting the humanist contention that ancient teachers are the foundations of moral wisdom, as Michael Dixon writes, “Thenot, citing the ethical authority of Tityrus, uses the exemplum of the Oak and the Briar to demonstrate the effects of imprudence and rash anger in refutation of Cuddie’s emotional, *ad hominem* outbursts” (142). The old shepherd’s tactic appears to make Cuddie forget about his aversion to listening to the wisdom of his elders:

To nought more Thenot, my mind is bent,
Then to hear novells of his devise
They bene so well thewed and so wise
What ever that good old man bespake. (94-97)

Throughout their exchange Thenot never once modifies his argument, but Cuddie forgets about his earlier complaints about the weather’s effect on his drooping herd and the rotting heads of

aged men to become a willing audience for a tale written by “that good old man” (97) that is about to be related to him by another old man.

As Norma Greco points out, the fable illustrates figuratively the truth that Thenot has told Cuddie literally (6). By communicating the fable to Cuddie, Thenot is endeavouring one final time to make the young man understand the value of the wisdom afforded by old age, and the dangers that are associated with the dismissal or the destruction of the elderly. The “goodly Oake” is declining in years. As “King of the field” (Spenser FE 108), it once supplied abundant shade as well as acorns that “larded many swine” (110). Now however, its branches are “beaten with stormes” (112), and over time “grey mosse marred his rine” (111), and his now leafless top is “wasted with wormes” (113). Thenot highlights the Oak’s glorious past by explaining,

For it had bene an auncient tree,
Sacred with many mysteree,
And often crost with the priests crewe
And often hallowed with holy water dewe. (207-10)

There is no denying the Catholic connotations that underscore words such as “mysteree,” “priests crewe,” and “holy water.” Reformers were aware that many older generation Christians remained faithful to much of the doctrine associated with the old religion, as was apparent in the religious practices of the Anglican Church, but they were also aware that the wisdom of these elders was integral to educating the younger generation. Although the Oak has experienced the old faith, there is still much that can be learned from its venerable presence.

By highlighting the tree’s usefulness in the past, and by including the words “sacred” and “hallowed” to describe the old Oak, Thenot suggests that, like the elderly, the Oak still commands a degree of reverence. Steven Marx supports the idea that the passage does not necessarily have to be categorized as an allusion to the Elizabethan religious conflict or to any specific historical persons. He acknowledges that Thenot refers to the oak as “holy eld” (104), yet he believes these words are only to show a degree of reverence for the old tree. Marx maintains that when the aged are scorned and rejected, “society denies not only its past and future, but also its relation to God” (Marx 102). He points out that in most societies the elderly are accorded positions of respect because of their wisdom, and an old person’s proximity to the sacred (along with that of children and the poor) means that old people supply a link to the kingdom of heaven. “If infants trail clouds of glory from whence they came,” he asserts, “the

elderly who are returning there already seem surrounded by an aura of mystery” (102). Consequently, by making the old tree the sympathetic character in his fable, Thenot may be referring to himself as well as the older generation, which feels threatened with rejection at the hands of the younger generation.

In Thenot’s fable the “bragging brer” (Spenser FE 115) is “embellished with blossomes fayre” (118). In the same way that Cuddie taunts Thenot’s age and lack of sexual vitality, the Briar flaunts its young beauty and taunts the Oak’s sterility. Jealous of the Oak’s position in the field, the Briar argues that the Oak is useless because it no longer provides fruit or shade, while in the spring the young rose bush displays fresh smelling blossoms “Dyed in Lilly white, and Crimsin redde” (130). It is no coincidence that Thenot alludes here to the Tudor Rose, which Elizabethans might consider not only a unifying symbol for England after the War of the Roses, but also a reminder of the cycles of religious and political strife informing the Tudor reign.

E.K. notes in his gloss that the Oak is “daunted and confounded” (514) by the Briar’s tirade, and as a result of this bewilderment, it cannot censure the young bush’s irreverent and hurtful rhetoric. Even while the Briar presents its case to the husbandman, the Oak remains silent. Similar to Cuddie’s grievances at the opening of the eclogue, the Briar’s complaints are based on vanity and the immediate circumstances. The Briar employs flattery meant to endear the husbandman to the bush’s beauty over any other, more significant, past or present worth. Addressing the husbandman as “my liege Lord, the God of my life” (150), the Briar appeals to the husbandman’s pride and sensuality by asking,

Was I not planted by thine own hand,
To be the primrose of all thy land,
With flowering blossomes to furnish the prime,
And scarlot berries in Sommer time? (165-9)

The husbandman falls victim to this empty rhetoric. He does not take the time to consider that the attributes the Briar emphasizes are transitory, and like Cuddie’s youth, these red and white blooms are subject to the cycle of the seasons. Even though the Briar’s blossoms flower in the spring, and his berries ripen in the summertime, these are purely ephemeral attributes. What the husbandman does not take into account is the fact that although the Briar provides pleasing roses for a brief period, their beauty only disguises the Briar’s barbed branches. The prickly thorns, it

can be argued, represent the Briar's true character, while the blossoms and berries are merely pretty diversions that are meant to cloak the actual malevolence of the bragging bush.

The Briar's thorny personality is evident in its attack against the old Oak, and unlike Thenot's talent for countering Cuddie's criticisms with his own astute observations, the Oak's ability to communicate is impeded by the Briar's rhetorical expertise. Thenot explains that the "Oake cast him to replie / Well as he couth" (189-90); however, it is too little too late. Instead of showing respect for an oak that is a "holy eld" (206), the Briar's "painted words" (160) convince the husbandman that the old tree must be destroyed. With the Oak's demise, the Briar is left alone in the field. Similar to Thenot's earlier remark that in the spring young shepherds think they are "Lords of the yeare" (41), the Briar now stands "like a Lord alone / Puffed up with pryde and vain pleasaunce" (223). Nonetheless, the seasons inevitably change, and like inexperienced young herdsman's boys who consider "Age the host of Greevaunce" (90), the young Briar is forced to discover that without the protection from the elements once afforded by the old Oak, he cannot survive. Thenot's warnings in the framing debate, "...Yount is a bubble blown up with breath / Whose witt is weakness, whose wage is death" (88-9) is realized in the fate of the Briar. The Briar's vanity, pride, and irreverence for its elder cause it to speak without thinking past the immediate gratification his words will produce, and just as the Fifth Commandment warns, after dismissing the value of the old Oak, the Briar's days on earth are short. With the Oak now felled by the husbandman, the Briar finds itself a hapless victim of the "byting frost" (231), "waterie wette" (232), and "heaped snowe" (233). Without the old Oak's protection, the young Briar is no longer able to remain upright and inevitably becomes a casualty of the cattle tramping through the field.

Thenot has not quite concluded his fable before Cuddie abruptly cuts the old shepherd off. The Oak is chopped down and, as a result of ambition and arrogance, the Briar meets an early death. Patrick Cullen asserts that the eclogue portrays a "tragic and wasteful perversion of the healthy contest of age and youth" (39). Thenot's sad narrative is indeed a warning against youthful impertinence toward those who are older and wiser, but its effect may be neither tragic nor wasteful. Not only is the fable a way to hold Cuddie's attention, it is a device Thenot uses to assist the young man in understanding the overarching moral of their entire exchange. After hearing the fate of the young Briar, Cuddie claims that the fable is "a long tale, and of little worth" (Spenser FE 240), yet there is an element of discomfort in his words. Although he states

that he has gained “but little ease” (245) from the fable, and he insists that it is now time for the two of them to depart because the “day is nigh wasted” (246), Cuddie’s terse reaction clearly indicates that he will be contemplating the outcome of Thenot’s fable (and possibly Thenot’s advice) during his journey home.

E.K.’s glosses of the emblems that conclude the eclogue support this reading, notwithstanding critical debates about this commentator’s identity and reliability. Critics question his reliability as a commentator, and E.K.’s identity has been a persistent issue in the study of Renaissance literature (Steinberg 49). However, as Patsy Cornelius notes, discovering it would not offer readers any greater insight into the *Calender* than the anonymous commentator already provides (64). As for his reliability, in his “Dedicatory Epistle,” E.K.’s description of himself as a “Pandares” (Spenser 417) figure whose purpose is to add “a certain Glosse or scholion for the exposition of old words and harder phrases” (418) is a troubling Chaucerian allusion, which indicates that the commentator’s purpose may merely be to lead the reader to error. Throughout the *Calender* E.K. consistently undermines himself either by contradicting what he may have already said or by adding glosses that are directly opposed to what the poetry says (Steinberg 46). At times in the eclogue E.K. includes a gloss that highlights some inane matter such as explaining that the term “hoarie locks” (Spenser FE 181) is meant to be read “[m]etaphorically for withered leaves” (425). While some critics assume that E.K.’s often erroneous glosses are the result of carelessness, Theodore Steinberg argues that their blatant errors are not only well thought out, but also amusing, and these qualities “cast light on the true nature of the *Calender*...by way of contrast with what the poetry itself says” (47). E.K. points out a subject for the reader to consider in detail and then writes “utter foolishness about it” (54), as in his unsupported identification of Tityrus as Chaucer. The task of the commentator seems not to be to clarify but rather to present what appear to be arbitrary judgements that actually support the *Calender*’s satirical aspects, such as Cuddie’s sudden interest in the wisdom of old men when Thenot offers to narrate a fable by Tityrus.

In his glosses of the emblems, E.K. carelessly or deliberately errs in attributing a Latin translation of Cuddie’s proverb “Nemo Senex metuit Jovem” (No old man fears Jupiter) to Erasmus. Steinberg points out that this proverb does not appear anywhere in Erasmus’s *Adages*. The only book where Cuddie’s Italian proverb, “Niunto vècchio, Spaventa iddio” (No old man fears the Lord), has been located is John (Giovanni) Florio’s 1591 *Giardino di Rcreatione*,

which was printed after the 1579 publication of *The Shepheards Calender*. William W. Barker suggests that E.K. could actually mean that “Erasmus takes it otherwise,” and instead of implying that old men blasphemously disregard God, the proverb actually means that “experienced old men do not fear a false God (Jupiter) and are therefore models of probity and wisdom.” E.K. may have devised a refined joke that would not be lost on the educated reader of Erasmus: “the point is to overthrow the authority of the young” (Barker, 252), so the eclogue actually closes with an ironic comment that further demonstrates Cuddie’s folly in his patent refusal to take any of Thenot’s wise advice into consideration.

Of Cuddie’s Italian emblem E.K. says:

a byting and bitter prouerbe, spoken indeed at the first contempt of old age generally. For it was an old opinion, and yet is continued in some mens conceipt, that men of yeares have no feare of god at al, or not so much as younger folke. For that being ripened with long experience, and hauing passed many bitter brunts and blastes of vengeaunce, they dread no stormes of Fortune, or wrathe of Gods, nor daunger of menne, as being eyther by longe and ripe wisdomed armed against all mischaunces and aduersitie or with much trouble hardened against all troublesome tydes. (427)

E.K.’s own interpretations of the emblems favour old age over youth. He interprets Cuddie’s proverb as suggesting that because they have experienced many “storms of fortune,” old men are secure in the knowledge that they can endure whatever God has in store for them. He glosses Thenot’s emblem “Iddio perche e vècchio / Fa suoi al suo essemplio” with the paraphrase, “God which is himselfe most aged, being before al ages, and without beginninge, maketh those, whom he loveth like to himselfe, in heaping years unto theyre dayes , and blessing them wyth longe lyfe” (Spenser 427). Both glosses suggest that E.K. is more sympathetic to Thenot and his wise argument than to Cuddie and his youthful petulance.

Although he claims he “Ne ever was to Fortune foeman” (Spenser FE 21), this admission does not indicate that Thenot believes himself to be impervious to the providential cyclical nature of life. In fact, it can be argued that Thenot is stating the exact opposite. By addressing the reality of winter “drearly shooting his stormy dart / Which cruddles the blood, and pricks the harte” (45-46), Thenot is not only offering his young counterpart a warning about preparing for future tribulations; he is also acknowledging his own vulnerability in the face of the wintery seasons of both the year and of life. While E.K.’s comments must be closely scrutinized, in this

particular case he glosses that Thenot's emblem suggests that even men who have lived a life of evil are afforded a chance to repent. This evaluation of Thenot's emblem supports the old shepherd's attempts to teach Cuddie that appropriate fear of God is practical, yet one must also have faith in divine providence and eventual redemption through Christ.

The Shepheardes Calender is a work that will continue to be studied for its allegory, but references in the "Februarie Eclogue" to specific contemporary persons, events, or creeds appear less likely when one side of the dispute is clearly the most reasonable. No one can agree on or be certain of any secret allusions to Spenser's contemporaries, yet the eclogue does reflect contemporary tensions between youth and age in a period of rapid change. When it is analyzed in this fashion, asserting a concluding state of harmony or stasis is unnecessary. After Cuddie cuts Thenot off from further explaining the reasons for the Briar's fate, the young herdsman's boy states, "My hartblood is welnigh frorne I feel" (243). Although Cuddie's emblem suggests he is still resistant to the wisdom of an old man, he admits that his blood has frozen in his veins. While his condition could be a consequence of weather, it could also be the result of finally starting to comprehend what Thenot has been trying to convey all along. If this is the case, then it is possible that like Juventus and Euphues, a once arrogant youth will become amenable to aged wisdom, and that instead of grasping at the fleeting pleasure of youthful recreations, he will find contentment and consolation in God's divine order and the mutability of life, while striving to become a suitable young representative for the continued purification of the English church.

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